

# CAHS

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**Testimony before the Appropriations Committee  
Governor's Budget Proposal – Department of Social Services  
Commission on Children, Children's Trust Fund  
Submitted by Maggie Adair, Policy Director  
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Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Maggie Adair, Policy Director of the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). CAHS is a statewide nonprofit organization that works to end poverty and to engage, equip, and empower all families in Connecticut to build a secure future.

Faced with a precipitous drop in state revenue and a budget deficit in the billions, policymakers must now make difficult decisions. CAHS believes that Governor Rell and our state legislators should take the long view on budget priorities, preserving the integrity of programs and policies that support children, families, and the well-being of the state.

Tonight, I am commenting on the budget proposal that the Governor has put forth impacting the Department of Social Services, the Commission on Children, and the Children's Trust Fund.

## **DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (DSS)**

**I will start with the good news.** We applaud the Governor for **increasing funding for food and nutrition programs**. Under the Governor's proposal, eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly known as Food Stamps) would increase from 130 percent to 185 percent of the federal poverty level. The cost is borne nearly entirely by the federal government so the cost to the state is minimal. An estimated additional 19,000 families will be served by SNAP. **Connecticut has had the option to make this change, and should have done so long ago.**

The Governor also increases funding for other nutrition programs, including food pantries, the state Supplemental Food Stamp program for legal immigrants, and the purchase of protein foods.

I would point out that the federal government's economic recovery bill has infused significant new money to the SNAP program. SNAP benefits, under the federal bills, increase by 13 percent to offset rising food costs. Connecticut will receive \$152 million more in SNAP funding and assist 240,000 participants. Connecticut will also receive \$2.5 million in administrative funding to handle the influx of new SNAP recipients. Regardless of the Governor's proposal, Connecticut will be seeing plenty of new money to boost its food and nutrition programs for struggling families.

**Now I will move onto the bad news.** The Governor's budget proposal makes a **series of cuts to health care services to the poor, including Medicaid, SAGA, and ConnPACE**. I will not go into specifics since many other people will testify tonight about the illogical cuts to our health care system for low-income children, parents, disabled, and senior citizens. I will make a few points:

- The cuts to health care services and additional costs imposed on low-income families, taken all together, will have a heavy toll on our most vulnerable citizens. Rather than save health care costs, Connecticut will pay more in the end.
- Due to increased co-pays and premiums, cost-sharing proposals, drastically limiting dental care to adults, gutting wrap-around Medicare Part D services, cutting transportation services for SAGA, and other important provisions, people will not seek the health care and drugs they need to remain healthy. They will end up getting sicker and cost the state more long-term.
- Since Connecticut will receive \$1.3 billion from the federal government in stimulus payments specifically through enhanced Medicaid reimbursement, if the state is going to take this extra Medicaid money and use it for other purposes to fill the budget gap, at a minimum, it should not take away benefits Medicaid and the other state health insurance programs for low-income residents. The whole point of the FMAP provision is to avoid having states cut Medicaid coverage.
- Using federal funds to liberally supplant existing funds is not an economic stimulus strategy. The federal funds are temporary. It will set Connecticut back once we pull out of this economic recession.
- When we have so much federal Medicaid money coming to Connecticut, and when we know that our health care system is broken, why would we want to start to dismantle health care for the poor, disabled, and elderly? **This is exactly the time to seize the opportunity and build a blueprint to ensure that all Connecticut people – the uninsured and under-insured – have access to comprehensive health care.**

CAHS also opposes **deferring the cost-of-living increases** for people on Temporary Family Assistance (TFA), State Administered General Assistance (SAGA), and the Aged, Blind, and Disabled. When Governor Rell said she needed to create a budget that focuses on the core services and our most vulnerable citizens, we would have expected these populations would be protected.

CAHS is also concerned about the “cost-savings” incurred through the creation of newly configured block grants. About \$2.5 million in each fiscal year would be reduced through creation of a **Community and Social Services Block Grant** and about \$425,000 in each fiscal year would be reduced through the creation of an **Employment Services Block Grant**. The funds transferred to these new block grants from existing line items would be re-allocated according to a plan developed by the regional planning agencies. We are concerned about the ramifications of this proposal for the well-being of low-income children and families. **We know, from past history, what a block grant means: reduced investment in people.**

CAHS is also concerned about the reduced funding in FY 11 for **Care 4 Kids, the child care subsidy program**. In the economic downturn, now is the worst time to reduce funding for Care 4 Kids. The goal should be to keep as many low-wage earners working as possible. Without a Care 4 Kids subsidy, low-wage workers cannot afford to work. We need people working and spending their earnings back into the community. We also need to keep children in high-quality educational settings so they do not fall behind in the critical early years of learning development.

The **\$13.7 million in new federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)** coming to Connecticut should not be used to supplant existing services. Prudent uses for the new infusion of federal CCDBG dollars could: expand access, promote affordability for existing families, improve quality of services, improve eligibility levels, raise provider rates, and beef up workforce training.

CAHS is submitting separate more detailed testimony about the Care 4 Kids program.

## COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

CAHS is **opposed to the Governor's proposal to eliminate the Commission on Children**. CAHS has worked closely with the Commission on Children on several issues, so we are familiar with its ability to bring real results through policy change. The Commission on Children is a diligent advocate for children and families. The Commission: develops smart, results-driven policy; brings in federal and philanthropic dollars to the state; conducts research on children's needs; and empower parents to become community leaders. The parent education programs developed by the Commission on Children are national models replicated in other states. The Commission has played a role in key policies over the years in the areas of early childhood education, adoption reform, prevention, child poverty, and health.

Elaine Zimmerman, the Commission's Executive Director, has provided an effective and needed voice at the Early Childhood Cabinet and the Child Poverty and Prevention Council. We cannot lose the passion, expertise, and results that the Commission on Children provides to the state of Connecticut.

## COUNCIL TO ADMINISTER THE CHILDREN'S TRUST FUND

CAHS **opposes the proposal to eliminate the Children's Trust Fund and move about \$13.5 million in programs to the Department of Children and Families**. Programs operated under the Children's Trust Fund are highly regarded, particularly the ground-breaking Nurturing Families Network program. Why fix programs that are not broke?

The prevention-oriented programs of the Children's Trust Fund are not well-suited for the intervention-oriented model of the Department of Children and Families. We are also concerned that people who could benefit from the Children's Trust Fund programs will not participate in a DCF-run program. At-risk first-time mothers participate in the Nurturing Families Network on a voluntary basis and must commit to adhering to the program guidelines. If a parent is not a DCF client, why would the parent want to voluntarily enter a program housed at DCF? The stigma attached would be too great. Finally, we are concerned that the very successful programs operated by the Children's Trust Fund would get lost in the huge operations of DCF.

## BETTER CHOICES FOR CONNECTICUT

Thank you for giving CAHS the opportunity to testify about our concerns with the Governor's attempt to close the biennial budget deficit, much too largely on the backs of our most vulnerable citizens and the working poor. We are concerned that the Governor has fallen short in her proposal by tackling only a \$6 billion budget shortfall – \$2 billion less than the \$8 billion budget deficit cited both by the Governor and the Office of Fiscal Analysis. The Governor's budget proposal falls short in addressing the budget deficit.

**Better Choices for Connecticut** has released a White Paper, detailing ways to address the budget crisis by investing in our people, our communities and our state. As author David Osborne said when Governor Rell brought him to Connecticut last month, it is "pure fantasy" to think that Connecticut can cut its way out of this budget. Better Choices for Connecticut offers a revenue plan that will ensure Connecticut invests in its ingenuity, talent, workforce, and infrastructure so that we come out stronger on the long run. We urge you to consider revenue options as you craft a budget package, keeping in mind the need to avoid hurting the state's most vulnerable people and the health of the state's economy through unwise spending cuts.

